



APPALLING DISASTER.

A STATEN ISLAND FERRY-BOAT BLOWN UP. NEARLY FIFTY KILLED AND OVER SEVENTY WOUNDED—THE EXPLOSION—RESCUING THE VICTIMS—SCENE IN THE HOSPITALS AND AT THE MORGUE—HEARTRENDS SIGHTS—RECOGNIZING THE DEAD—CAUSE OF THE EXPLOSION—THE ENGINEER'S STATEMENT.

The most terrible accident which has occurred in the neighborhood of this city for many years sent a thrill of horror over the community yes a day after seen. It was caused by the explosion of the boiler of the Staten Island ferry-boat Westfield of the Staten Island Railroad Company's line. The boat is known as "the extra boat," and is used on Sundays and on holidays, or at hours when the tide of travel sets strongly to Staten Island. She was accustomed to make three trips on Sundays, starting at 12 o'clock, 3d, and 7d p.m., from the Whitehall landing, coming between the regular boats, which make hourly trips. She was about to start on her first trip, yesterday, and was two or three minutes behind her time, when the boiler exploded. There were from 200 to 250 passengers on board at the time, according to the statement of officers and the ticket-taker. Most of the passengers were congregated almost directly over the boiler, on the southern part of the boat, in order to catch the fresh breeze blowing from the south.

THE EXPLOSION.

THE FORWARD HALF OF THE BOAT BLOWN TO FRAGMENTS.

Those who witnessed the explosion say that there was first a dull, crashing sound, somewhat resembling that made by a falling building, followed immediately, indeed, almost simultaneously, by the rush of escaping steam. The main deck was forced upward for a considerable distance, the beams and heavy planks torn into fragments, many of them thrown high into the air, falling in a confused heap into the hold. The forward parts of the upper deck and cabins for a considerable distance aft were splintered and shattered. The pilot-house, directly over the boiler, was hurled into the air a distance of 50 feet or more, and in falling alighted on the hurricane deck, and was shattered. The pilot, James McGee, was in the pilot-house at the time, waiting for the boat to start. He was blown up and descended with the house, and yet, strange to say, aside from a few severe scratches and contusions, and a severe shock, escaped unharmed. He could scarcely believe that he was not mortally injured as he crawled from the ruins and saw the havoc and desolation that had been made. The heavy smoke-stack was also blown high in the air and fell into the general wreck. The escaping steam for a time filled almost all parts of the boat, and many were scalded who would have otherwise escaped unharmed.

SCENE ON THE NORTHFIELD.

About half an hour after the explosion occurred, the steamer Northfield of the same line came up, and made fast to the bow of the Westfield and the end of the Ferry Company's pier. As fast as the wounded or dead were removed from the mass of rubbish in the fore-hold of the wrecked steamer, they were taken on board of the Northfield and laid out on the deck or in the cabins. The dead were covered with portions of the clothing freely scattered around. The majority of the gashed and wounded were cared for at once by Drs. Shine, Healy, or McEwan. There were a few cases, however, where it was evident that the sufferers could not possibly survive long, and it was deemed best not to add to their agony by attempting to dress their hurts. One of these was a man about 50, apparently a mechanic, judging from his dress—although it was difficult to tell what was the texture of his dress at first sight, so torn and begrimed it was. He was scalped apparently from head to foot. The skin had literally peeled from his face, neck, and that portion of his breast displayed by his tattered shirt-blossom, while through the rents in his clothing could be seen various wounds. His breast and portions of his ribs had been crushed by some heavy substance, and the wonder is that he was not killed outright. He lay on the deck unconscious, but moaning, and occasionally moved an arm or leg in his great agony. Not far away was a young man, also fearfully scalped about the face and breast. He, however, seemed to be semi-conscious, and as he moved from side to side, occasionally uttered an indistinct word. Every kind of hurt or scald was to be met with. In one of the cabins lay the dead body of a woman, and near her a little girl, apparently about 5 years old, also dead. On the other side lay a beautiful boy, about 10 months old, with a slight cut or contusion on the forehead from which the blood had welled, dabbing his golden hair, and there was also a bad scald on the little fellow's breast. Nevertheless, the attendant physician thought there was little doubt that he would recover, his injuries being superficial. Some thoughtful, kindly person, probably possessing one of the same age safe at home, had procured a long cushion and carefully placed the little sufferer on it. As he lay there moaning, and occasionally breaking out into a pitiiful wail, there was scarcely one of the bystanders who was not moved to tears by this exhibition of infantile suffering. Who he was or what had become of his parents, no one seemed to know. He was subsequently removed to one of the hospitals.

THE EXPLODED BOILER.

The boiler was a low-pressure, tubular one, 24 feet long and 10 feet in diameter. It was made in 1862, in Brooklyn, at the same time that the boat was built. By the certificate on board, it appears that it was inspected on the 15th of June last, by John K. Matthews, one of the Government Inspectors of Boilers, and was pronounced by him to be in good condition. On that occasion the boiler was subjected to a hydrostatic pressure of 31 pounds to the square inch, and it was deemed safe to run it at a pressure of 25 pounds to the square inch. This certificate of inspection was registered in the Custom-House on July 15. According to the engineer's admission, the pressure just before the explosion was 27 pounds.

The force of the explosion was very great. The portion of the boiler which exploded was opposite the fire-box, and toward the bow of the boat. The upper half of the shell of the boiler, 20 feet in length, and weighing two tons or more, was torn off, and hurled a distance of 25 feet or more into the bow of the boat, where it is wedged fast. Where the starting point of the fracture was it is difficult to tell. The iron sheet is torn as cleanly as though it had been composed of cloth instead of metal. In some places the rent follows a line of rivets, and in others the tough metal is torn straight through the center. The main portion of the boiler, weighing several tons, was lifted from its setting and twisted several feet out of position, lying partially across the boat, instead of in the center.

FATE OF THE PASSENGERS.

It has been stated that a majority of the passengers were seated or standing on the main deck, or the upper decks, directly over the boiler. These were blown upward, some of them to a height of 25 or 30 feet, many of them, probably 40 or 50; they fell into the water. Very many of the remainder fell into the debris in the hold, and quite a number were partially buried beneath the rubbish. Those on the upper decks who had escaped unharmed fled to the shore. Michael Quigley of No. 9 State-st., and J. H. Hopkins of Newark, N. J., remained no fewer than 11, and of these, two were infants. Other boatmen were nearly as successful, and it is estimated that from 30 to 40 persons were taken from the water by them. It is feared, however, that from 12 to 15 persons were drowned, and without the confusion that prevailed, or the boat, instead of position, lying partially across the boat, instead of in the center.

AT THE NEW-ST. POLICE STATION.

Many of the scalded were taken to the New-st. Police Station by their friends. Sergeants Banfield and McGivern were in charge, and exerted themselves to the utmost to afford aid to those who came there. Supplies of the kind needed were procured from the adjoining drug stores, and were applied by Police Surgeon Andrews or Dr. Amable, or under their direction. Several of these persons were afterward removed to the hospitals in carriages or ambulances, several dead bodies were taken to the station-house and subsequently to the Morgue.

CAUSE OF THE EXPLOSION.

STATEMENT OF THE ENGINEER, CAPTAIN, AND SECRETARY OF THE COMPANY.

It is exceedingly doubtful whether the cause of the explosion will ever be ascertained. The officers of the Company claim that the boiler was made of the best material, and having been so lately inspected, they cannot account for the explosion. The engineer, Harry Robinson, a mulatto, has been in the employ of the Company for several years. He is said to have been a very careful, steady man, in whom every confidence was placed by his superiors. He went on board of another boat immediately after the explosion, probably fearing that the survivors would leave him if he remained on the Westfield and became known to the crowd. In conversation with one of the officers of the boat on which he took refuge, he stated that he could not account for the explosion. Then there would be a hash as the stretcher was brought forward, and the corpse carefully lifted out of the water and taken away. Now it was the body of a man, decently dressed in black cloth and clutching a cigar in his fingers; now a woman, with hair disheveled and garments torn; and once a little girl, in simple holiday attire, with pale face, and garments once white, but now discolored by the turbid water. At first, some of the men said there were about 10 bodies in the water there; they did not think the number was greater; then the crowd gathered in the bow of the Westfield, and the grapping continued until, at sundown, 27 bodies had been found. The rising tide produced a swift current toward the East and North Rivers, and we do not sweep away other bodies.

THE CAPTAIN'S STATEMENT.

Capt. Isaac Vreeland, the commander of the Westfield, was at the pilot-house at the time of the explosion. He was about to give the command to cast off the lines that bound the steamer fast to the landing, when he heard a dull, heavy roar, and felt a jar that shook the boat violently. His first impression was that one of the South Ferry boats had run into the bow of the Westfield. He was soon deceived, however, by the rush of escaping steam. He at once turned his attention to the task of assisting the passengers down from the upper to the main deck, and afterward in taking ashore those who

were scalped and otherwise injured. From his position at the rear of the boat he was unable to see the explosion or what at once followed at the forward end of the boat. He was unable to say what caused the explosion. He had always thought Robinson, the engineer, to be a careful, experienced man, and one that would not be apt to carry more steam than allowed by the terms of the certificate of inspection. He believed there were not more than 200 persons on board, and of those he did not believe more than 25 per cent were killed or injured. He admitted, however, that the greatest part of the passengers were in that part of the boat that felt the greatest force of the explosion, in order that they might enjoy the southerly breeze and at the same time be in the shade. It was the first time that any serious accident had occurred on one of the Company's boats.

THE SECRETARY'S STATEMENT.

John J. Stevens, Secretary of the Staten Island Railroad and Ferry Company, stated that he was in Brooklyn, visiting a sick relative, at the time of the explosion. It was the first Sunday that he had been absent from the office six years. He heard of the accident on the way across the river on one of the Hamilton-ave. ferry-boats. One of the deck-hands told him that he saw the explosion. He could hardly believe it possible, as no serious accident had ever before happened to one of their boats. He visited the injured at the station-house and at the ferry-house, and on the Northfield, and saw that they were properly attended. He produced certificates to show that all of their boats had been inspected within the time prescribed by law. The boiler of the Westfield was inspected on June 13 last. He could not account for the explosion. He had not seen Robinson, the engineer, since the disaster, but had always considered him a very capable, efficient man. The Westfield was an extra boat and made trips between the regular boats. She was intended to leave Whitehall at 12, 3d, and 7d o'clock p.m.; but none of the boats ran exactly on time. It was intended to have as near as possible, one boat in the slip all the time. So fast as one boat departed another arrived to take her place. This was done because the people would remain on board a boat than be copied up in the waiting rooms. There were not generally so many women and children who were still alive. James O'Connor, a lad, of No. 19 Pearl-st., was fishing within a few feet of the Westfield, and, escaping injury from the shock, he succeeded in rescuing the two children. One of the men engaged in this work said, "The water was so full of them, we couldn't help getting some out." An instance of the kind of service generally rendered was given by Charlie Deane, a boatman residing at the foot of Jackson-st., who voluntarily remained all the afternoon, with his boat, grapping for remains.

THE ENGINEER'S STATEMENT.

The engineer, Henry Robinson, a colored man, was reported to have disappeared after the accident, and was believed either to have been killed or to have concealed himself through fear of personal violence from the friends of the unfortunate passengers. He was found, however, when sought by Police Inspector Jameson and Fire Marshal Keady, and when questioned, manifested perfect coolness and self-possession. Capt. Braisted, the Ferry Superintendent, vouches for him as a trusted servant of the Company and a good engineer. Robinson is a very intelligent-looking man, about 40 years of age, and prepossessed in his favor all who heard him speak. He said:

"I have been employed by the Company for 16 years; I was in the fire-room five minutes before the explosion; asked the fireman, Patrick Finnegan, about the water, and he said it was 'all right'; went to the boiler myself, and found the water above the third cock; went up through the engine-room and noticed that the gauge indicated 27 pounds pressure of steam; then I went down; in two minutes I came back, and just as I was going down the stairs to the engine-room, the explosion took place; I cannot say what caused the explosion; the boiler had a patch on the part where the break was; I examined it last Thursday and found it in good condition."

The fragment of the boiler which was thrown out upon the Barge Office platform was pronounced to be so plainly an unsound piece of iron, upon examination by several persons who were presumed to be good judges, that Inspector Jameson caused it to be removed to Police Headquarters for safe-keeping. It was stated that some of the deck-hands asserted that the engineer had been absent from his post for at least 15 minutes instead of five, as stated by himself. There was also much comment upon the fact that while the Inspector's certificate gave 25 pounds pressure of steam as the limit of the allowance, the engineer admitted that the boilers were subjected to 27 pounds pressure five minutes previous to the explosion.

The Company proposed, late in the afternoon, to remove the Westfield to Staten Island; but Inspector Jameson interposed, and forbade her removal beyond the limits of the county. She was thereupon placed in charge of Coroner Young, and towed to the dock of the Novelty Iron Works, at the foot of Thirteenth-st. The Coroner required that everything on board should remain undisturbed until after the inquest.

the vessel. The hull seemed to be a crater, one rim of which was at the line passing through the center of the vessel from wheel to wheel. At the farther end the flooring of the main deck was lifted several feet from its position as far as the curve of the stern extended, but between this and the middle of the boat everything had been blown high in air, and had then fallen back into the hold in a confused mass, the smoke-stack falling on the top of the heap. The boilers were in plain view almost from the first, and were seen to be thrown diagonally across the boat, so that one end rested several feet beyond the line of the keel.

The numerous persons who witnessed the explosion say that for a moment the air above the boat was filled with human beings and flying masses of timber, to a height of over 50 feet, and that then followed a cloud of steam and smoke. Then came the shrieks and groans of the victims. The water around the boat, and particularly on the east side, was thickly strown with persons struggling for life. Mr. Roberts, an agent of the Associated Press, was standing in front of the barge office, and near the piling of the slip, when the explosion occurred. He leaned close to the piling, under shelter of a beam, to protect himself from falling fragments. Then, as soon as possible, he, with others who hurriedly came out of the Barge Office, began the work of rescue. Mr. Roberts alone, it is stated, dragged out of the water seven women and children who were still alive. James O'Connor, a lad, of No. 19 Pearl-st., was fishing within a few feet of the Westfield, and, escaping injury from the shock, he succeeded in rescuing the two children. One of the men engaged in this work said, "The water was so full of them, we couldn't help getting some out." An instance of the kind of service generally rendered was given by Charlie Deane, a boatman residing at the foot of Jackson-st., who voluntarily remained all the afternoon, with his boat, grapping for remains.

THE WOUNDED.

ABROITZ, ISAIAH, Union-ave., near Grand-st., Brooklyn, E. D., aged 26; scalped arms and head.

BALSTET, ANN, 61 Beach-st.; scalped arms and head.

BARTET, HENRY, 61 Beach-st.; at Bellevue Hospital.

BILLINGS, —, aged 16; lives on Fourth-st.; delirious; at Park Hospital.

BRAHIDUR, Captain, tobacconist, Warren-st., Brooklyn; leg broken and scalped.

BROWN, JOHN, Atlantic, near Hicks-st., Brooklyn; thigh and breast bones broken.

BROWN, JOHN II., No. 116 Spencer-st., age 25; hand and head scalped.

BUCKING, MARY, 121 Washington-st., leg broken; had a small baby; at Park Hospital.

BUCKLEY, TIMOTHY, No. 47 Essex-st.

CAHILL, ANNIE, delirious; residence unknown; at Park Hospital.

CALIS, RALPH, 27 Spring-st.; aged 10; scalped about the head, face and arms, and badly bruised; at Park Hospital.

CALVIN, M., residence unknown; at Park Hospital.

CASINER, ELIZABETH; face and shoulders scalped.

CHENEVIERE, ARTHUR, No. 246 Clinton-st., Brooklyn; at Park Hospital.

CHENEVIERE, MARIA, No. 246 Clinton-st., Brooklyn; at Park Hospital.

CLARK, JOHN D., aged 16, No. 161 West Twenty-sixth-st., scalped; at Park Hospital.

CLAYMET, EMILY, Mrs., of Jersey City, scalped about face and body.

COEN, HERMAN, Mary-ave., Brooklyn; at Park Hospital.

COHENDEUR, CHAS. W., No. 361 West Sixteenth-st.; at Park Hospital.

COYLE, ANDREW, No. 51 Monroe-st., severely scalped; body at Park Hospital.

DALTON, ALEXANDER, No. 16 Monroe-st., N. Y.; at Park Hospital.

DALY, JAMES, No. 658 Water-st., aged 23; scalped, face and arms, and badly bruised; at Park Hospital.

DEARNA, MRS. PETER, of No. 131 East Thirteenth-st., N. Y.; at Park Hospital.

DOLBIN, ALEXANDER, No. 76 Monroe-st., sailor; scalped about face and hands.

DETERMAN, HERMAN, No. 11 Leonard-st.; foot scalped.

DIKES, JOACHIM, No. 11 Allen-st., tailor, married; scalped all over.

ELSER, GEO. M., No. 75 Ann-st., N. Y., at Park Hospital.

ELSER, LOUIS, No. 74 First-ave.

FINLAY, THOMAS, No. 13 Essex-st.

FINLAY, MRS., No. 13 Essex-st., at Bellevue Hospital.

FINNEGAN, PATRICK, of Staten Island, fireman on the Westfield; at Park Hospital.

FREEHOPE, ANNIE, age 40, of No. 15 Thompson-st.

FREEHOPE, AMELIA, age 8, of No. 151 Thompson-st.

FREEHOPE, FREDERICK, tailor, of No. 151 Thompson-st.

FREEHOPE, FREDERIC, aged 4, at No. 151 Thompson-st.

FREEHOPE, FREDA, aged 7, No. 151 Thompson-st.

GERSON, JOHANNA, Grand-st., Jersey City, at Park Hospital.

GREGULCET, OTTO, butcher, No. 231 Grand-st.; scalped, legs, side and body.

GRIERSON, AMELIA, Grand-st., Jersey City; at Park Hospital.

GRIERSON, LOUIS, No. 74 First-ave.

GRIERSON, PATRICK, of Staten Island, fireman on the Westfield; at Park Hospital.

GRIERSON, ROBERT, of Staten Island, fireman on the Westfield; at Park Hospital.

GRIERSON, ROBERT, of Staten Island, fireman on the Westfield; at Park Hospital.

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